



# THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF 76

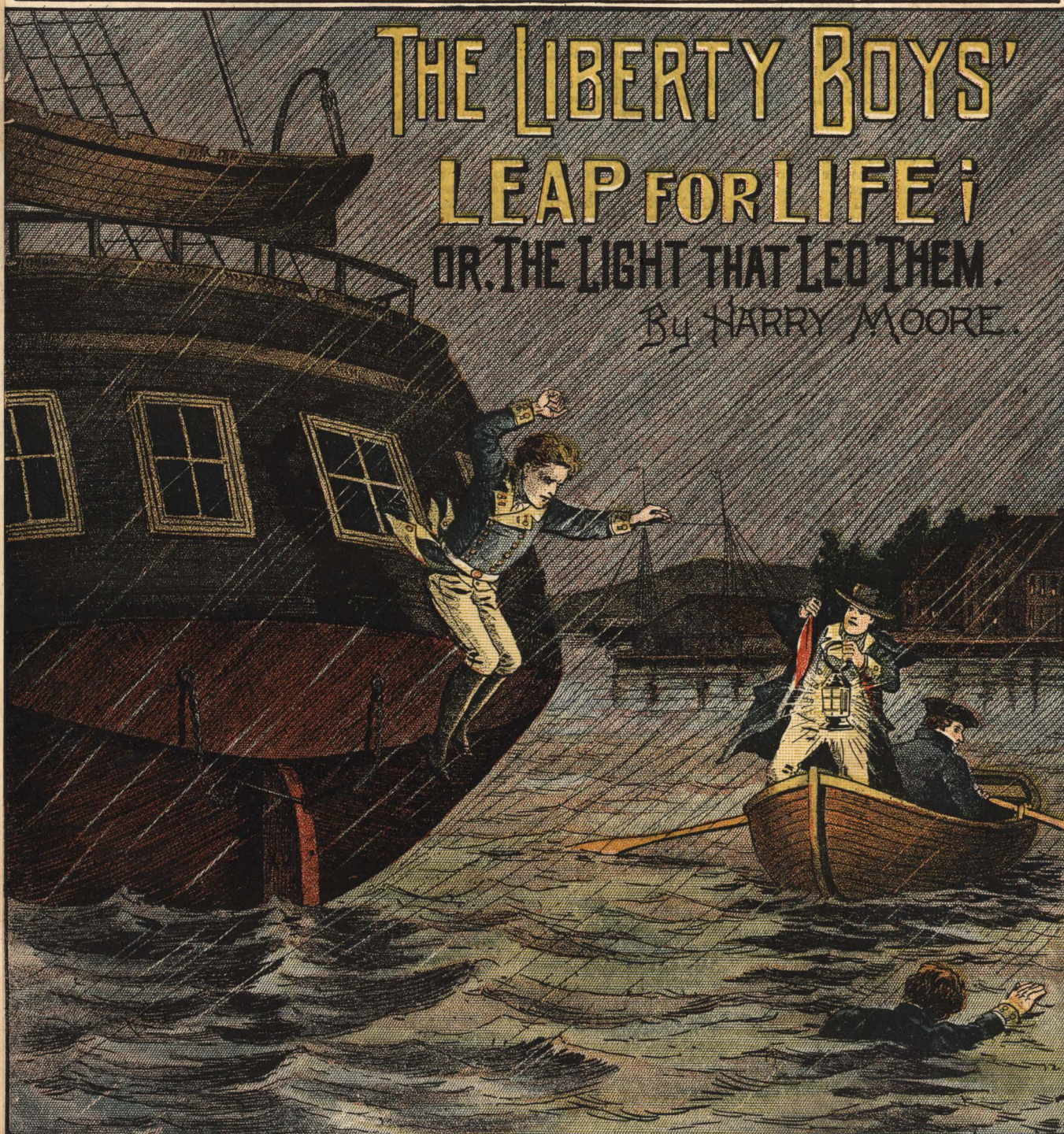
A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

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No. 85.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 15, 1902.

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## THE LIBERTY BOYS' LEAP FOR LIFE; OR, THE LIGHT THAT LED THEM. By HARRY MOORE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DICK SLATER AND GENERAL WASHINGTON.

In the fall of 1776 the British army, under General Howe, occupied New York City, while the patriot army under General Washington, occupied a point near White Plains, in the heart of Westchester county.

At that time the patriots were entirely on the defensive, and the object of the British was to capture them. Two years later, however, in 1778—the time when we call the reader's attention to the scene—while the two armies occupied exactly the same positions, the British being in New York and the patriots at White Plains, yet the British were in reality on the defensive, and all they hoped to do, or were trying to do was to hold the city of New York.

The commander-in-chief of the patriot army, after two years of waiting, two years of suffering and fighting, was now in a position to take the initiative, and he wished to do it.

One morning in July, of the year 1778, the commander-in-chief called his orderly.

"Go to the quarters of 'The Liberty Boys of '76,'" he said, "and tell Dick Slater, their captain, to come to headquarters."

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

Twenty minutes later he returned, accompanied by a young man of perhaps nineteen years. This young man was Dick Slater, who had made a name for himself by his wonderful and daring work as a scout and spy; while his "Liberty Boys"—a company of youths of about his own age—had made themselves famous as fighters on the field of battle.

"Dick Slater, your excellency," announced the orderly, and the youth entered the room in which the commander-in-chief sat.

General Washington rose and gave Dick his hand.

"Good morning, my boy!" he said, cordially.

The commander-in-chief thought a great deal of Dick,

for the youth had done a great deal of valuable work for him—work which few persons could have done or would even have been willing to attempt.

"Good morning, your excellency!" replied Dick.

"How are you feeling, Dick?"

"Fine, sir."

"I am glad to hear that. Take a seat."

The commander-in-chief resumed his seat and Dick took a chair near at hand.

"Well, Dick," said General Washington, "you have done a great deal of good work for me as a spy, in the past, and that is the reason I have sent for you this morning."

"Yes, sir?"

"How are you feeling—ready and willing to attempt daring and dangerous work?"

"I am ready to attempt anything, sir, for the good of the cause."

"I knew that would be your answer," with a smile.

"Well, I have some work on hand, and it is something which may lead you into dire danger."

"That will not deter me, sir."

"I know that; well, Dick, you know we tried to strike the British a crushing blow down in New Jersey, but failed, as the battle of Monmouth was about an even thing."

"Yes, sir."

"The British then came on and occupied New York, while we came up here. I have not given up hope of striking the British, however."

"So I supposed, sir."

"I have secret information that the French fleet under Count d'Estaing is coming to New York, and if it reaches there and we can co-operate with it I think it possible that we can capture Clinton's army."

"I wish that we might do so, sir."

"And I. Well, I intend to try, but in order to do so it is necessary that I know when the fleet appears off Sandy Hook so as to send some one to confer with Count d'Estaing."

"I understand."



"Exactly; and that is what I desire that you shall do, Dick."

"You wish me to go to New York and remain there till the French fleet puts in an appearance, and then let you know?"

"Yes; there is other work I wish you to do also."

"What is that?"

"I wish you to take note of the disposition of the British in New York, and to make a drawing showing the best points of approach for our army, when making the land attack in concert with the attack from the bay."

"I shall be glad to attempt to do the work, your excellency."

"I was sure you would be willing to do so, Dick. Of course, it will be dangerous work entering New York City, going right into the heart of the British army in that way."

"I have done as dangerous things before."

"So I know; but there is always a chance that you may attempt a thing of this kind once too often, my boy."

"I will be very careful, sir; not alone on my own account, but for the reason that it is for the interests of the cause that I succeed in doing the work I am sent to do."

"You are right. It is best, always, to be as careful as possible."

"So I think, sir."

"When can you start, Dick?"

"At any time, sir."

"You can get away to-day, then?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well; that is settled. Now for a few instructions. I have friends in the city, Dick, who are in communication with the French all the time, and they keep me posted. There is one man in particular upon whom I depend. His name is Monsieur Ricard, and he is the man I wish you to find."

"Can you direct me to where he lives?"

The commander-in-chief shook his head.

"I do not know where he lives, Dick."

"You do not?"

"No; he is very much afraid that he may be suspected, and so he has never permitted any of my messengers to visit his home."

"Ah, I understand; but where does he meet them when they appear?"

"On the street?"

The youth was surprised.

"Yes."

"But how does he know them, and how do they know him?"

"By a pre-arranged system of signals and passwords."

"I understand."

"Monsieur Ricard walks up and down Broadway every evening, from the hour of six till eight o'clock. He scrutinizes the people, and if he sees a man with a small, blue and buff rosette on the left lapel of his coat he knows that it is a messenger from me."

"I understand."

"But to make sure that he is right he speaks the words, 'It is ten miles to the Harlem River.'"

"I see," breathed Dick.

"And then my messenger replies, 'That isn't far if one rides a good horse.'"

"I see, sir," said Dick; "that is a good plan."

"Yes; having satisfied himself that the man is really my messenger, Monsieur Ricard leads the way to some secluded spot and a conference is held."

"I see. That is simple enough, your excellency."

"So it is; all you have to do is to fasten the rosette on your coat and promenade slowly up and down Broadway until you hear some one utter the words given above; then you make the proper answer and all will be well."

"Very well, sir; I will make all my arrangements and will leave here soon after dinner and will reach the city in the evening in time to appear on Broadway."

"You are sure you understand all, Dick?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Very good."

They talked for fifteen or twenty minutes longer, and then Dick saluted and took his departure. When he reached the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys" the youth was assailed with a volley of questions from the youths.

"What is in the wind, Dick?"

"What did the commander-in-chief want?"

"Are you going anywhere?"

"Some more spy work, old man?"

Such were a few of the questions, and Dick waited till the youths got through; then he said:

"Yes, I am going to do some more spy work, boys."

"Going down into the city, eh?" from Bob Estabrook, a bright, handsome fellow of Dick's age, and the latter's best friend, as they had been comrades all their lives, their parents owning adjoining farms not far from Tarrytown.

"Yes, Bob."

"Well, let me tell you something, old fellow."

"Go ahead."

"All right; I'm going with you."

"You are?"

"Yes."



"How do you know you are?"

"Because you are going to let me go."

"How do you know I am going to do that?"

"Because if you don't I will thrash you—and I know you don't want to be thrashed."

Bob said this with a mock serious air, and Dick smiled and replied:

"No, of course I would not wish to be thrashed."

"Then I'm going—hurrah!"

"Yes, I guess I will take you with me, Bob."

"Good!"

"I did intend to go alone, but on second thought I think you may be of use to me."

"When will we go?"

"We will start about one o'clock."

"All right; I'll be ready."

## CHAPTER II.

### "TRAPPED!"

It was six o'clock in the evening.

Two handsome, bronzed young fellows were walking slowly down Broadway in the city of New York.

They were Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook.

They had succeeded in getting into the city without being suspected of being patriots, and now they were on the lookout for Monsieur Ricard.

On the left lapel of Dick's coat was a small, blue and buff rosette, and he kept a sharp lookout for some one who would utter the words that would tell him that it was the Frenchman he had come to the city to confer with.

Onward they made their way, slowly, and finally they reached Bowling Green. Turning, they crossed the street and started back up Broadway. They walked slowly and made their way back up to the Common without having been accosted.

"Jove! the fellow doesn't seem to be on hand, does he?" remarked Bob, in an undertone.

"No; but I suppose he will be, presently. We will keep on promenading and sooner or later we will run across him."

They crossed over and walked back down Broadway. They went clear down to Bowling Green and back up to the Common, and still had not been accosted.

"Seems rather queer," said Dick, in a low, cautious voice.

"You are right," agreed Bob.

"Well, we will do our part, anyway. All we have to do is to keep on promenading, and if he doesn't make himself known, it will be his fault."

"That's right."

Again they crossed over and set out down Broadway, and when they were down almost opposite Trinity Church Dick heard the words, "It is ten miles to the Harlem River."

He was surprised, however. He expected, of course, that he would be accosted by a man, but when he glanced around there was no one near him save a girl of perhaps sixteen or seventeen years. She was a dark-faced, dark-eyed maiden, but very beautiful, Dick thought. Her voice, too, was soft and musical.

Naturally, Dick was, as we have said, surprised by seeing a girl where he had expected to see a man, but she had uttered the correct words, and so he replied, in a cautious voice:

"That isn't far if one rides a good horse."

The girl walked past the youths, and as she did so she said to Dick:

"Follow me at a safe distance."

"Very well, miss."

The girl walked onward at a fair pace and the youths followed, keeping at a distance of perhaps five or six yards. They were old hands at this sort of business, and no one to have seen them would have suspected that they were following any one. They looked about them as they walked along and occasionally paused for a few moments to glance into a show-window; in fact, they acted the part of a couple of young fellows who were simply walking out for pleasure and recreation. Yet they never for a moment lost sight of the girl, and when she left Broadway and turned down a side street, they did likewise.

They continued down this street quite a ways. The street was narrow, with tall, sombre-looking buildings on both sides. When they were about the middle of the third block the door of one of the buildings on the right-hand side suddenly opened and two men leaped down the short flight of steps and seized the girl.

She screamed for help and attempted to struggle, but was helpless in the hands of the powerful men, who lifted her bodily, and, running up the steps, entered the house and closed the door with a slam.

It was all done so quickly that although Dick and Bob leaped forward to render the girl aid they were not quick enough, the door being slammed right in their faces, so to speak.

The youths kicked on the door and did their best to



effect an entrance, but all to no avail. About the only result of the fuss they made was the sound of mocking laughter which came from within.

They paused in their efforts to force an entrance and stared at each other with wonder and amazement written on their faces.

"What does it mean, Dick?"

"I don't know, Bob."

"Neither do I."

"It is a very strange affair."

"I should say so!"

"I wonder who those scoundrels were?"

"That is more than I can say; and for that matter, who was the girl?"

Dick shook his head.

"You have me there," he said.

"You were expecting to be met by a man, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"And this girl showed up instead. That seems rather odd."

"So it does; but this occurrence is stranger still!"

"You are right; this rather beats anything I have seen or heard of lately."

"We must rescue the girl, Bob!"

"So we must."

"Let us know when you succeed in doing it—ha! ha! ha!"

The words sounded almost in the youths' ears, and they looked all around but could see no one.

Bob nodded toward the door.

"That came from in there, eh, old fellow?" he remarked, in a low voice.

"Undoubtedly."

The youth again knocked on the door.

"Hello, in there!" he called out.

"Well, what do you want?" came back in muffled tones.

"We want you to open this door."

"Oh, you want us to open the door, do you?"

The tone was mocking.

"We do!"

"Why?"

"We want to get in."

"Oh, you want to get in?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"You know well enough."

"Oh, do I?"

"Yes."

"I'm sure I do not."

"Bosh! Open the door or we will break it down, for we are determined to rescue that girl!"

"Oh, that's why you want to get in, eh?"

"It is."

"You are determined to rescue the girl?"

"We are!"

The youth spoke firmly and determinedly.

"Humph! Do you think you could do it if you were in here?"

"We could try, at any rate."

"Yes, you might try." The accent was on the word "try."

"Open the door!"

The youth's voice was grim. He was tired of bandying words with the fellow; the more so because he shrewdly suspected that it was a ruse on the part of the enemy to hold them on the front stoop while the girl was being spirited away.

"Then you really want the door opened, do you?" There was a peculiar intonation to the voice.

"I have already told you so several times."

"And do you think you would come in if the door was open?"

"We certainly would!"

"You must deem yourselves brave men, then."

"Why so?"

"Because only brave men would dare enter a house where any number of foes might be awaiting them."

"We will risk that part of it; you open the door."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Sure!"

"Very good; I will put your courage to the test."

"Go ahead."

The two youths looked at each other and set their teeth. "If he opens the door shall we enter, Bob?" whispered Dick.

"Just as you say."

"We may get into trouble."

"True; but we must try to rescue the girl."

"Yes, and it may be that the fellow is trying to intimidate us by making us think there is great danger within the house when possibly there is not."

"Well, lead the way and I will follow, Dick," in a grim whisper; "and if they go for us we will give them a lively fight, I tell you!"

"All right, Bob."

At this instant, without the least noise or creaking, the



door swung open, inward, and the youths were free to enter.

It was as dark as could be inside the house, for it was now lamp-lighting time without, and this house seemed to be unusually sombre and gloomy within.

The youths stared into the darkness of the hallway, but could not see a thing. They hoped to be able to make out the form or forms of the enemy, but failed in this.

Suddenly they gave a start and stared into the hallway with wondering eyes.

What they saw was sufficiently startling.

Away in the distance, seemingly at the farther end of the hall, what appeared to be a flaming hand was seen tracing words on the black background, in letters of fire. The words were:

"Why don't you come in?"

"Come, Bob!" said Dick, in a low, determined voice, and he strode forward into the hall. In his hand he held a pistol, and close behind him was Bob, also with a pistol in his hand.

Scarcely were they well within the house when the door went shut with a slam and the youths found themselves surrounded by darkness so dense and thick that, seemingly, they could have cut it with a knife.

The flaming hand had disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared and the words had now almost faded away. But the affair was not ended yet. Suddenly the flaming hand appeared to view once more, and after performing a series of movements, disappeared, leaving the one word standing out in letters of fire. The word was:

"Trapped!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SCARLET DOZEN.

The youths did not utter a word, but watched the flaming word until it, having grown gradually dimmer and dimmer, faded entirely away, and then Dick whispered:

"Looks as if we have gotten our foot in it, Bob."

"Yes; that said that we are trapped."

"That is what it said."

"Well, they may have us trapped, but they haven't cut our claws yet."

"No; and we will use our claws if they attack us!"

"We will that!"

Suddenly they heard a voice.

"Well, you fellows are braver than we gave you credit for being," was what the voice said. There was triumph in the tone.

"Is that so?" replied Dick, not a quaver in his voice.

"Yes; but don't you know, I should set you down as being more foolhardy than brave?"

"No, is that so?"

"Yes."

"We don't look at it that way."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Well, it is true, nevertheless, for what can you do?"

"Rescue the girl."

"Ha! ha! ha! Rescue the girl, eh?"

"Yes."

"You are mistaken, young man."

"You think so?"

"I know it. You could not rescue the girl if there were a dozen of you instead of only two, as is the case."

"We would show you."

"Bah!"

"We will show you, as it is!" cried Bob, angrily and impulsively.

"Ha! ha! ha!" again the mocking laughter. "Say, I like the bold manner in which you fellows face the fate which menaces you."

"Do you?" from Dick.

"Yes."

"Well, you see, we don't think any very bad fate menaces us."

"You do not?"

"No."

The voice seemed to come from the farther end of the hall, and the youths strained their eyes to try to make out the form of the speaker, but could not.

"Perhaps you think you are not in any danger at all?" said the voice.

"Oh, no, I won't say that," replied Dick; "but I don't think we are menaced by any danger which we cannot counteract."

"You really think that?"

"Yes."

"Then I will prove to you that you are helpless and in our power."

"Prove it."

"Very well—look!"

Instantly a number of flaming masks appeared to view as if by magic. The masks were full-face ones and had holes for the eyes, which could be seen shining through.



There were seven or eight of the masks, and the youths understood that there was a human face behind each. The youths understood also that the masks had been rubbed with phosphorus which gave them the flaming appearance. They had not for a moment been deceived or awed by the flaming handwriting, nor were they awed now. They realized, however, that with seven or eight men against them they would have a hard fight of it if they succeeded in making their escape.

Acting upon the impulse of the moment both youths lifted their pistols, and, leveling them quickly, fired.

Crack! crack!

The two reports rang out almost as one.

It sounded like one elongated report.

Instantly the flaming masks disappeared from view.

A cry of pain was heard also and something which sounded like muttered curses.

"We winged one of the scoundrels, Bob!" whispered Dick; "but likely they will riddle us with bullets now!"

"Let's give them a couple more shots, Dick!"

"All right."

But before they could draw their other pistols the floor seemed to suddenly give way beneath their feet and they fell down, down, seemingly a long distance.

They were considerably jarred by the concussion when they struck what appeared to be a dirt floor, but were not injured, and assuming an erect position, waited, pistol in hand, for what might turn up.

They listened intently, but could hear nothing.

Not a sound broke the stillness.

Neither could they see anything.

It was, if anything, darker than it had been up in the hallway.

"What do you think of this, Bob?" asked Dick, presently, in a low voice.

"I think it is about the worst adventure we have had for a long time, Dick."

"That is what I think—and the end is not yet."

"No; they probably have some more nice little surprises in store for us."

"Likely."

Then they became silent and with set teeth waited for what might transpire.

To say the girl was horrified when she was seized by the two men and carried into the building is stating the matter mildly. She was almost dazed with horror.

When they were inside the building and the door had been closed behind them they were in total darkness; but

the two men did not hesitate. They seemed to know their way perfectly, and traversed along the hall to the extreme rear of the building, where a door was opened on the right and they passed through it.

"Now, don't cry out," warned one of the men, in a menacing voice; "if you do we will put a knife into your throat, and that will gag you—forever! Understand?"

The girl understood, and shivered, for there was something in the tone—in its coldness and heartlessness—that impressed her with the belief that the speaker was a man who would not hesitate an instant to do what he threatened to do.

They made their way along—the girl was walking between the men now—for quite a distance, seemingly traversing a transverse hall, and then they came to another door. There was a few minutes of fumbling, and then this door opened. They passed through and the door closed behind them.

Turning sharp to the right they advanced a few steps and then ascended a flight of stairs. On reaching the landing they continued onward for quite a distance, and reached the front of the building.

Then a door at the left was opened, the girl was pushed through without ceremony and the door was closed behind her and locked.

This done, the two men hastened back in the same way they had come.

Left alone, the girl stood perfectly still and listened. She heard the footsteps of the men as they moved away and then she exclaimed:

"Oh, I wonder what it means? I wonder why I have been made a prisoner in this manner?"

At this instant a portierre which closed a doorway between the room the girl was in and another was pulled aside, flooding the room with light from the other room and a man stepped noiselessly in and confronted the startled maiden.

Startled did I say? Indeed she was, for the man who so suddenly appeared before her was dressed in a brilliant scarlet suit of clothes, and his face was hidden by a black mask.

He stood there, motionless, staring at the maiden through the eyelets of the mask, his eyes glowing.

"Who are you?" finally asked the girl, her voice trembling in spite of her efforts to keep it steady.

"You ask who I am?"

"Yes."

"You really wish to know?"

"Yes, yes!" eagerly, anxiously.



"Then—see!"

As the man spoke he threw the mask up over his head and his face was revealed.

A gasping cry escaped the lips of the maiden.

"Gilbert Gaspard!" she exclaimed.

The man bowed, while a mocking smile illumined his not unhandsome, but rather cruel and sinister face.

"At your service, Miss Irene Ricard," with a mocking bow and with an exaggerated show of politeness.

"Why have you done this?" cried the girl, her indignation for the moment mastering her fear.

"Why?" with a sneering smile.

"Yes, why?"

"I should think the answer to that question would suggest itself to you, Irene."

"Don't call me Irene!" haughtily. "You have no right."

"But you will acknowledge that I have the might, Irene, dear, and that amounts to the same thing." The tone was sneering, cruel, triumphant.

"My name is Ricard, and I would thank you to call me by it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the villain, for such he evidently was. "What a saucy little minx you are, Irene!"

The girl did not deign to answer, but looked at the man with scorn showing on her face and in her eyes.

"So you want to know why I have done this, do you, my dear?" the man continued. "Well, as I am a very accommodating man, I will tell you."

He paused and looked at the girl as if expecting her to say something; she maintained silence, however, and he went on:

"I suppose you remember, Irene, the last time I called at your home?"

The girl bowed.

"I remember," she said.

"I asked you to consent to become Mrs. Gaspard, you remember?"

"I have not forgotten."

"Nor have I!" meaningly. "You refused to consent. Is it not so?"

"It is."

"If you remember, I told you then that whether you consented or not you should one day be my wife?"

"I remember that you, like the coward you undoubtedly are, chose to use threatening language toward me," was the scornful reply.

"Oh, no; I simply stated some facts, that is all."

The girl's lip curled in contempt.

"You did not do anything of the kind," she declared,

spiritedly; "and I will say to you, now and here, that I will never be your wife, Gilbert Gaspard!"

"Oh, yes, you will!"

"I will not!"

"You will be my wife or," the voice grew hard and fierce, "you will never be the wife of any man!"

"You cannot succeed in your plans, Gilbert Gaspard; remember, there were people on the street who saw your men bring me into this house."

Gaspard laughed.

"You have reference to the two fellows who were following you, I suppose," he said.

"I am not aware that there were any men following me," was the reply, "but I think that I saw some men not far away."

"Never mind whether they were following you or not," with a laugh; "it doesn't matter. One thing is certain, they will not either be able to rescue you or to inform any one of your capture."

"Why not?"

"Because they are, like yourself, prisoners within the house."

"In this building?"

"Yes."

"And they are prisoners?"

"They are prisoners in the hands of the Scarlet Dozen."

"The Scarlet Dozen?" inquiringly.

"Yes; I am the leader of the Scarlet Dozen, Irene, and I assure you that we are a powerful organization. You cannot escape, and you will have to marry me."

"Never! I will never consent to marry you!"

"Then you will never leave this building alive!"

"I will risk it."

"We shall see," sternly; "I will leave you for a while, as I must go and look after the two strangers who interested themselves in your behalf and were trapped as a result. These two rooms are yours; make yourself at home. You need not try to get out, however, or to attract attention by calling out, for you can do neither the one nor the other."

With a mocking bow the man dropped his mask over his face and left the room, locking the door after him.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE CAVERN OF HORRORS.

Dick and Bob stood motionless, pistol in hand, and waited, watched and listened. They expected that their



enemies would put in an appearance at almost any moment, and the youths were determined to make a strong fight for life and liberty.

They were in a trap, true, but they would not give up without a struggle.

Several minutes passed, and not hearing any sound to indicate that the enemy was coming, the youths became impatient.

"Let's feel around a bit, Dick, and see what kind of a place we are in," whispered Bob.

"All right, Bob; but hold your pistol in readiness for instant use."

"All right."

Then they began feeling about them. They soon found the wall and one went to the right and the other to the left. It did not take them long to make the circuit of the room, and it was found that they were in a room which did not exceed fifteen feet in width by twenty in length.

Presently they heard a noise above their heads, and looked upward, but could not see anything. Then ensued a few minutes of silence, followed by a human voice.

"Hello, down there!" was what the voice said.

"Hello, yourself!" replied Dick.

"How do you like your quarters?"

"We haven't been here long enough to know."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you will be before you get through with it."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps we may not stay so long as you think for."

"I guess you will."

"Well, if we have to stay here very long we would be glad to have a light so as to see our surroundings."

"That's against the rules."

"What is against the rules?"

"To have a light."

"It is?"

"Yes; we never let any one have a light when they are in the Cavern of Horrors, as we call it."

"Is that what you call this place?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it is such a horrible place."

"Is it, really?"

"Yes."

"Of what do the horrors consist?"

"It would not do to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it would frighten you to death."

The youths laughed aloud, which must have been a surprise to the man above, for he said:

"What's the matter? Have you gone crazy?"

"Oh, no!" replied Dick.

"Then why the laughter?"

"We are amused."

"By what?"

"Your statement that if you were to tell us of what the horrors consisted it would frighten us to death."

"Oh, that was what made you laugh?"

"Yes."

"Humph! You seem to have a great deal of confidence in your courage."

"Well, we don't believe that there is anything that could scare us to death."

"That is all right; but nevertheless there are horrors in the cavern in which you are standing. If you could see what they are they would make your hair stand on end in horror."

"That is what you say."

"It is the truth."

"We don't believe it."

"You don't?"

"No."

"You are skeptical fellows, eh?"

"Yes, quite so. I'll tell you what you do: Just pass us down a lighted candle and let us have a look at the horrors."

"And let you put a bullet through me while I am doing it, eh?" in a sarcastic voice.

"Tie a string to the candle and stand back away from the opening and we will be unable to do you any harm."

"Perhaps not; but I shall not pass you down a candle."

"Why not?"

"I have already told you, it is against the rules."

"Whose rules?"

"The rules promulgated by the captain of the Scarlet Dozen."

"The Scarlet Dozen?"

"Exactly."

"Who and what is the Scarlet Dozen?"

"It is the organization that you attempted to fight against when you were so rash as to venture into this building."

"What are you—robbers and cut-throats?"

"Never mind what we are. It is sufficient that we have you at our mercy."

"You think you have."



"I know it. You cannot by any possibility escape from the Cavern of Horrors."

"How do you know we can't?"

"Because it is an impossibility."

"You don't know that."

"Yes, I do. There have been many inmates of the Cavern of Horrors, and never yet has one escaped."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"What became of them?"

"They died!"

"They did?"

"Yes."

"Where—in here?"

"Exactly."

"Humph!"

"You don't believe it?"

"No."

"Just kick around a bit with your feet; you will find their bones lying about."

"Bosh!"

"You don't believe me?"

"No."

"It is the truth, just the same."

"We have already moved all around in the cavern—if that is what the place is—and did not find any bones."

"You have moved all around in the cavern?" in a tone of horror—whether simulated or real it would have been hard to say.

"We have."

"And were not bitten?"

"Bitten?" inquiringly.

"Yes, bitten."

"By what?"

"The snakes."

"What snakes?"

"Why, the ones that swarm down in the Cavern of Horrors, where you are."

"Bah! there are no snakes here."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it." Dick's voice was firm and confident, for he believed the man was simply trying to frighten himself and companion.

"That is where you are mistaken."

"You can't make us think so; we have made the rounds of the cavern and did not find any snakes."

"They are there, nevertheless, and I don't understand how it happened that you escaped being bitten."

"Oh, go along away and stop trying to frighten us!" said Dick. "It is useless."

"I am simply telling you the truth," the man persisted; "the cavern is filled with snakes—copperheads, and if you move about you are sure to be bitten!"

Then the trap door suddenly closed and the sound of footsteps was heard.

"What do you think of the snake story, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I don't believe it, Bob."

"Neither do I."

"If there had been snakes here, as he says is the case, they would have bitten us when we were making the circuit of the place a little while ago."

"Certainly they would. He was just trying to frighten us."

"That is what I think."

"But he can't do it, eh, old man?"

"Hardly, Bob."

"Not a bit of it—but I say, old fellow, I wish we were out of here!"

"So do I."

"Do you suppose the trap door overhead is the only way of getting out?"

"I fear so."

"And we can't get up to it."

"No, it is out of our reach."

"Well, let's try the walls again and see if we can find a door."

"All right; I'm willing."

"Snakes or no snakes, eh?"

"Yes."

"All right; here we go—but I can't help feeling a bit squeamish, eh, Dick?"

"It wouldn't be pleasant to get hold of a copperhead."

"You are right; we know what they are."

"Yes; if bitten by one there would be no hope."

"No; but I don't believe there are any here."

The two made their way to the wall, as before, and then went along, feeling carefully, one going to the right, the other to the left. They had their teeth set firmly together, for in spite of their belief that there were no snakes, they could not be absolutely sure of it, and the strain on them was considerable.

Slowly they made their way along and presently there was a low exclamation from Bob.

"What is it?" cried Dick. "Not a snake, I hope!"

"No; I've found a point where the wall is not solid!"

"Not solid?"



"No."

"And is it stone?"

"Yes—and that's what makes it seem so queer."

"I should say so!"

"There is a section about three feet wide and five feet high that I can feel move when I push against it."

"Perhaps it is a secret door, Bob!"

"Maybe so; I hope so."

"So do I."

Dick was soon at Bob's side and he tested the section of what seemed to be a solid stone wall, and found that Bob had spoken truly.

The wall at this particular point was not solid; it gave when pushed against.

"I think it is a secret door," said Dick.

"That's what I think; but how to open it?"

"That is the question."

"Yes, and it's a hard one."

Dick kept working at the wall, feeling all around, and finally got hold of a knob of stone which protruded from the wall, and pulled.

The result was all that could have been desired.

The loose section of the stone wall swung inward.

The youths felt out in front of them—for it was so dark they could not see—and found that there was an opening there.

What lay beyond?

This was a question which could only be solved by actual test, and the two brave "Liberty Boys" were just the fellows to make the test.

They did not hesitate, but stepped through the opening and pulled the loose section of the wall back into place.

"Now, Bob, we will see if there is any way of getting out of this place," whispered Dick.

"You go ahead and I will follow," was the reply.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN OF HORRORS.

The youths made their way slowly along through the darkness.

They soon discovered that they were in a large cellar or basement.

They ran against several posts or columns which supported the floor above their heads and finally they came to the wall.

"Now we will follow the wall," said Dick, "and perhaps we may find steps leading to the floor above."

They moved along and presently found the steps, and they had expected to do.

They made their way up the steps and tried the door at the top.

The door was fastened.

The youths pushed against the door with all their strength.

It resisted their efforts, though they could feel it give somewhat.

"We will have to throw ourselves against it," whispered Dick.

"That will make considerable noise, Dick."

"I know that; but we must take the chances of being heard."

"All right; give the word and I'll be right with you."

"Very well; ready?"

"Ready."

"Now!"

At the word they hurled themselves against the door with all their might.

The bolt had never been intended to resist such an assault, and it gave way and the door flew open with a crash, the youths falling forward into the room.

They caught themselves on their hands, however, and waited in this position, listening. They wanted to learn whether or not the noise had aroused their enemies.

Not hearing any sounds they rose to their feet.

They were still in total darkness.

They could not see their hands before their faces.

However, they had become used to the darkness by long time and were not bothered much on account of it.

They were learning to feel their way.

In his work of spying, Dick had often entered the house by way of the cellar, and he was aware of the fact that as a rule the cellar steps led up to the kitchen. Another rule a door opened from the kitchen into a hallway extending the full length of the house, and acting on the theory that it would be this way in this building, Dick led the way across the room and was soon successful in locating the door.

It was not fastened, so there was no difficulty experienced in getting it open.

The youths stepped through the doorway, and after finding about and taking a few steps they soon learned they were in a hallway.

"Come!" whispered Dick.



They moved slowly and carefully along the hallway and presently Dick stopped.

Streaming across the hallway in front of him was a small thread-like streak of light.

Stooping, Dick saw that the light came through the keyhole in a door.

He applied his eye to the keyhole.

The sight which met his gaze did not surprise him greatly.

"Seated around a table, on which were bottles and glasses, were ten or a dozen men.

The strangest thing about it all was the fact that each and every man wore a suit of clothes, scarlet in hue, and a black mask.

Whenever a man wished to take a drink he raised the mask high enough so that the glass could be placed to his lips.

"It looks as if the scoundrels keep each other's identity a secret from one another," thought Dick.

"What do you see, Dick?" whispered Bob.

"The Scarlet Dozen, I think, Bob," was the cautious reply. "Look and see for yourself."

Bob did so.

"You are right; it's the Scarlet Dozen!" he whispered.

"Hist! let's hear what they are talking about," whispered Dick.

He placed his ear to the keyhole and found that he could hear and understand all that was said.

"So those two fellows did not seem to be much frightened by your story about the Cavern of Horrors, eh?" were the first words Dick heard, and they were evidently spoken by the captain of the band.

"No," was the reply, "they did not seem to be at all frightened."

"They are no ordinary men, then."

"That is what I think, captain."

"They proved that when they fired on us and wounded Number Five," said another voice.

"You are right, Seven," said the captain; "only very brave men, men far out of the ordinary, would have dared do that."

"Well, we have them in a trap now," said another.

"Yes, and I think that it will be best and safest to finish them," said the captain, in a matter-of-fact tone that was unpleasant to hear; "dead men tell no tales, they say, and we don't want them to go off and tell that they saw the girl captured and dragged into the building."

"We are pretty safe, though, even if that should happen," said another; "for we are not in that building."

"True; but they might take it into their heads to search the adjoining building."

"Yes, so they might."

"Ah, I thought so!" said Dick to himself; "we are in a different building from the one we entered."

"How does the girl take her capture, captain?" asked one of the men. "Is she hysterical?"

"Oh, no; she takes it quite coolly."

"That is good."

"Yes; I should hate it if she was screaming and cutting up. She could not make herself heard down to the street, though, even if she tried. She can't get the windows open, and the sound would not penetrate through the walls and reach the ground from such a height."

"The girl is in the upper story," thought Dick; "well, as I have all the information we need we will not fool away any more time here but will make our way upstairs and see if we can find and rescue the girl."

The youth whispered to Bob to follow him, and they stole along the hallway on their tip-toes.

When they had almost reached the end of the hallway they came to a stairway.

They made their way up this to the next floor. Here they found another stairway and made their way to the next floor. Still another stairway was found and they ascended to the fourth floor.

"There is a light in a room at the farther end of the hallway," whispered Bob.

"So there is," agreed Dick; "and that is where we will find the girl, I'll wager. Come along."

They made their way along at a lively pace, and were soon at the door of the room containing the light. The door did not fit tightly, and the light streamed out around it at various points.

Feeling sure that the girl was in the room and alone, Dick did not hesitate but knocked on the door.

"Who is there?" came in a sweet, musical voice which the youths recognized as belonging to the beautiful girl who had been guiding them and who had been captured and dragged into the building.

"We are friends," replied Dick, in cautious tones.

"Who are you that would be my friends in this place?"

"We are the two young men whom you were guiding when captured."

"Ah! can it be possible?" exclaimed the girl. "How did you get in the house?"

"We will tell you when we have more time, Miss," replied Dick; "now we must work to get you out and away



in safety. Can you unfasten the door?—but of course you cannot.”

“No; the door is locked and the key gone.”

“Let’s break the door down, Dick,” said Bob.

“I guess it is the only way, Bob.”

“That’s what I think.”

“There is danger, however; those scoundrels may hear the noise and come up here.”

“We’ll have to risk it.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think they will hear, anyway. They are on the ground floor, while we are on the fourth floor.”

“All right; we’ll take the chances. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Now!”

At the word they both threw themselves against the door and it gave way with a crash.

They listened for a few moments, and not hearing any sound from below, they entered the room.

They were greeted by the girl, who was indeed glad to see them.

“Oh, I am so glad to see you!” she exclaimed, in a low, eager voice.

“And we are glad to see you, miss,” said Dick.

“And do you think we can escape, sir?”

“We can try, at least.”

“And the quicker we begin work the better,” said Bob.

“That is right,” agreed Dick; “come, miss, let us be going.”

He led the way out of the room, the girl following, and Bob bringing up the rear.

They made their way along the hall and down the stairs, and repeated this until they were on the ground floor.

Then they were given a start, for just as they started to make their way along the hallway, toward the rear of the house, the door of the room in which the youths had seen the members of the Scarlet Dozen Band suddenly opened, letting a flood of light stream across the hall and a man was seen to enter the room in haste. Then the three heard the man utter the words:

“The prisoners have escaped from the Cavern of Horrors, captain!”

The three realized that they were in great danger.

Unless they found some place of concealment, and quickly, they would undoubtedly be discovered.

And discovery meant capture.

What should they do?

Which way should they turn?

There was no time to lose.

What was to be done must be done quickly or all would be lost.

## CHAPTER VI.

MONSIEUR RICARD.

The three looked around for some place of concealment.

Suddenly a low exclamation escaped the lips of Dick and he said, in a low, cautious but eager tone:

“Quick! follow me!”

Under the stairway was a sort of closet of goodly size.

Dick opened the door and motioned for the two to enter.

The girl entered first, followed by Bob, and then Dick hastened to enter.

He closed the door—and not an instant too soon, for as he did so the members of the band known as the Scarlet Dozen came rushing forth from the room.

“One or two of you stay on this floor,” the three heard the captain of the Scarlet Dozen say; “the rest come up the stairs with me. I fear the scoundrels may have gone upstairs and be making the attempt to free the girl.”

There was the sound of hurried footsteps.

A number of men ran past the closet in which the three were hidden and ran up the stairs, the thump! thump! thump! of their feet sounding loudly above the heads of those in the closet.

The sound of the footsteps grew fainter and fainter and then Dick whispered to Bob:

“Hadh’t we better make a break and get out of here?”

“I judge we had,” was the reply; “those fellows will be coming down again in a few minutes.”

“Yes; there are a couple of them on this floor, but I think we can handle them, all right.”

“Of course we can; if they try to cut up we will put bullets through them.”

“That’s right. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then follow me.”

The youth pushed the door open and looked out.

Halfway down the hall stood the two Scarlet Dozen members.

They were talking to each other and their faces were not toward the closet.

The two youths, followed by the girl, stole toward the two rascals.

So busily engaged in conversation were the two that they did not notice the approach of the three.



Noting this Dick and Bob reversed their pistols, holding them by the barrel.

When the two were within striking distance they drew back and struck the two a severe blow with the butt of the pistols.

The rascals dropped as if hit with a sledgehammer.

They did not utter a cry.

A gasping groan was all that escaped their lips and it was not loud enough to be heard any distance.

"So far so good," said Dick; "now come along, miss, and we will see if we can make our escape from this place."

They hastened to the end of the hall.

There was a door there, and to their delight the key was in the lock.

It took but a few minutes to unlock and unbolt the door.

Then Dick turned the knob and pulled.

The door came slowly and creakingly open.

It was evident that it was not used very often.

At the same instant there came the sound of hurried footsteps on the front stairs, and a wild cry of rage and astonishment.

Some of the members of the Scarlet Dozen were coming downstairs again.

They had caught sight of the three, for on the air rose the excited exclamation:

"There they go! Quick, or they will make their escape!"

The three leaped through the doorway and Dick pulled the door shut.

Then they darted across the back yard.

They had not yet reached the fence when the door through which they had just escaped was opened.

"After them!" cried a voice. "Don't let them escape!"

The yard was surrounded by a high, board fence.

Luckily, however, the three found a gate, and after a few moments Dick succeeded in getting it open.

"Quick! through with you!" he cried, and the girl and Bob leaped through, Dick following and jerking the gate shut almost in the face of the nearest pursuer.

Then the three darted up the alley.

They had not gone far before the members of the Scarlet Dozen were in the alley and after them.

"All depends on our being able to outrun them," said Dick. "How is it with you, miss? Are you tired?"

"No, no!" was the reply; "I can keep this up for an hour, if necessary."

"Good! You keep ahead of us and set the pace, and we will keep the rascals from crowding up too close, even if we have to give them the taste of some bullets!"

The pursuers called out to the three to stop, but of course this had no effect.

"Stop, or we'll fire!" came the cry.

"That's a game two can play at!" retorted Dick. "You will do well not to start anything of the kind."

The three were soon on one of the streets and people could be seen walking along.

"I don't believe they will dare follow us much farther," said Dick.

And this proved to be the case. The pursuers stopped and made their way back toward the building which they had left only a few minutes before.

Seeing that the pursuit had been abandoned the three slowed their gait to a walk and made their way along as if nothing had happened.

"Have we gone much out of our way, miss?" asked Dick.

"No," was the reply; "we will soon be at our destination."

They walked about five blocks farther and turned two corners before reaching their destination, which proved to be a goodly sized building standing on a retired street.

The girl rang the bell, after they had ascended to the stoop, and presently the door was opened.

"Come in!" she invited, and the youths followed her into the house.

"This way," she said, and she led the way to what was evidently the library.

The room was lighted up, and seated in an easy-chair was a dark-faced but very good-looking man. He was pale, however, and it was plain that he was not well.

"Here are the young men, father," said the girl, stepping to the man's side and kissing him affectionately.

"Young men, Irene?" the man said, looking at the youths in surprise. "I expected but one."

"There are two of us, though, sir," said Dick, advancing. "Are you Monsieur Ricard?"

"That is my name," was the reply; "and are you messengers from General Washington?"

"We are, sir."

"Good! And your names?"

"My name is Slater, sir—Dick Slater."

The man's face lighted up.

"I have heard of you!" he exclaimed.

The girl, too, looked at Dick with eager eyes. It was plain that she had heard of him also.

"And my comrade is Bob Estabrook, sir."

"Ah, I have heard of Mr. Estabrook also," with a smile. "You are members of the company of youths known as 'The Liberty Boys of '76.'"



"You are right, sir," replied Dick.

"Good! Now I know I can trust you."

"And so you are Monsieur Ricard's daughter?" said Dick, looking at the girl with interest.

"Yes, sir," with a smile and blush. Then she turned to her father, saying:

"Father, we owe these gentlemen thanks for doing me a great service."

"How is that, daughter?" in surprise.

Then Irene told her father the story of her capture by the members of the Scarlet Dozen Band, and of her rescue by Dick and Bob.

"And so Gilbert Gaspard is the captain of that band of robbers and cut-throats, Irene?" exclaimed Monsieur Ricard, when the girl had told him who the leader of the band really was.

"He is, father."

"Well, well! This is a surprise, indeed!"

"I always told you, father, that he was a scoundrel."

"I know you did, Irene."

"But you would not believe it."

"No; I thought it a foolish idea on your part."

"But now you see that I was right."

"Yes, indeed; ah, it is fortunate that you did not take a fancy to the fellow, as you might have been married to him before you learned his true character!"

"Yes, indeed, it is very fortunate that I did not take a liking to him, father; for if I had done so, of course he would not have resorted to such tactics as he used to-night, and, as you say, I would probably have been married to him before we learned his true character."

"I think you will need to be on your guard from now on, Miss Irene," said Dick.

"You think the scoundrel will make further attempts against her, sir?" asked Monsieur Ricard, anxiously.

"I think it likely, sir."

"You will have to be very careful, Irene," said her father.

"I will be, father."

"You must not venture out alone in the day-time, and you must not venture out at all after nightfall."

"It will be best not to do so, sir," said Dick.

After some further conversation on this subject the conversation turned to the business which brought Dick and Bob to New York.

"I am sorry to say," said Monsieur Ricard, "that just at present I have no information to impart. I am expecting to hear some news every day, however, and it will certainly be only another day or so before I do hear. Then I will

give you the information and you can carry it to the commander-in-chief."

"Very well, sir," said Dick. "We will remain in the city and wait till you have the information to impart."

"I wish that I might ask you to remain under our roof, my friends," the man said, earnestly, "but I fear it would be bad, as, if you were to be seen coming and going to and from this house, it might occasion comment and suspicion—and that is something which I wish to avoid, as you will easily understand."

"Certainly," said Dick; "we will go to a tavern and stay there."

"There are several within two or three blocks," said the girl.

"We will go and secure accommodations at one at once," said Dick; "and then we will call to-morrow night at about this hour and see whether or not you have the information."

"That is a good plan," said Monsieur Ricard; "do not come near the house in the daytime."

"We will not, sir," Dick assured him, and then after some further talk the two took their departure.

They made their way down the street, keeping a lookout for a tavern, and presently they came to one.

There was a piazza in front, and stepping up onto this the youths advanced and were almost to the door when it suddenly opened and a man wearing a British uniform stepped through and confronted them, at the same time pulling the door shut behind him.

"Going in, boys?" he asked.

"We thought of doing so," replied Dick, quietly.

There were two whale-oil lamps hanging against the front of the tavern and this made it light enough so that the youths had no difficulty in sizing up the man. He was almost a giant in size and was evidently more than half drunk. Dick shrewdly guessed that he was just drunk enough to be mean, and it turned out that he was right for the redcoat said, with a leer:

"I wouldn't be in a hurry to go in if I were you."

The tone, more than the words, was threatening.

The youths thought that they scented trouble.

## CHAPTER VII.

"FIRE! FIRE!"

"Oh, we are in no particular hurry!" said Dick, calmly.

The redcoat looked from one to the other, wonderingly and somewhat questioningly.



"Oh, you ain't in any hurry, eh?" he remarked, sarcastically.

"No."

"Humph! I wouldn't have believed it!"

The youths looked at the redcoat questioningly.

"And there are two of you, too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Dick. He did not understand the meaning of the apparently irrelevant remarks, though he suspected.

"Say, I didn't suppose that two of you would permit yourselves to be barred out in this manner," the redcoat asserted, in a voice tinged with scorn.

"Barred out?" remarked Dick.

"Yes."

"How are we barred out?"

"Why, by me, don't you see? And haven't you acknowledged as much?"

"Well, I guess not!" said Dick.

"Not by a good deal, you big blowhard!" from Bob.

The redcoat stared at the two in surprise, and for a few moments seemed at a loss to know what to say. Then he exclaimed:

"What's that! Do you dare talk saucy to me?"

"Why, certainly," said Dick, quietly; "we didn't know you considered yourself as being a bar to our progress, but now that we understand it we will give you just about three seconds to step aside out of the way."

"Oh, you give me three seconds to get out of the way, do you?" sarcastically.

"That's what I said."

"And you think I will get out of the way, I suppose?"

"I think you had better."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes."

"And if I don't choose to do so, what will you do?"

"If you don't get out of the way we'll put you out!"

"So that's what you'll do, eh?"

"Yes."

"All right; that's just what I want that you shall do."

"My dear sir," said Dick, "wouldn't it be better and more pleasant for you if you step aside of your own accord?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I do. We don't wish to handle you roughly."

"Oh, you don't?" sarcastically.

"No."

"Well, I don't think you will do so, either."

"We shall be obliged to unless you step aside, as we are going to enter the tavern."

"And right away, too!" said Bob, who was impulsive, and who was itching for a chance to go for the redcoat.

"Right away, eh?" sneeringly.

"Yes, right away," said Dick; "come, stand aside!"

"I couldn't think of it, young fellow."

"I give you fair warning that if you don't stand aside you will find yourself standing on your head down in the street!"

The youth's voice was stern and had a determined ring.

"What's that! I'll find myself standing on my head in the street?" almost yelled the redcoat.

"That is what I said."

"That's what I thought you said."

"You thought right."

"Yes; but let me tell you, young man, that a dozen such fellows as you two couldn't stand me on my head!"

"Bah! I think you overestimate your abilities, my friend," said Dick.

"Not a bit of it; and I dare you to try standing me on my head!"

"Stand aside or we will be obliged to do it."

"Then I won't stand aside."

"You will wish that you had done so!"

"Bosh!"

"We have given you fair warning."

"Stop your talk and do something."

"You won't get out of the way, then?"

"No."

"Then we will have to put you out."

"That's what I want you to try to do."

"All right; you shall have your wish."

With the words Dick leaped forward and caught the redcoat by the throat. The fellow uttered a gasping sound and struck at the youth. Dick dodged the blow and gave the fellow a jerk which brought him to his knees.

"I'll handle him alone, Bob," said Dick as his comrade made a motion to assist; "I will show him that he isn't such a terrible fellow as he thought."

The redcoat was kicking, struggling and gasping, but his struggles availed him nothing; Dick's grip was like steel and the fellow was being speedily choked into submission.

Suddenly Dick crushed the man to the floor and then quickly seizing him by the coat-collar and waistband, lifted him by main strength and threw him over the piazza railing. It happened that a party of half a dozen redcoats were passing at that moment, and the redcoat struck in their midst and three or four of them were knocked down, the impact being so great.



Of course, this occasioned great excitement, and the redcoats kicked and floundered about and cursed in a manner that was terrible to listen to. They struggled to their feet and shook their fists at Dick and Bob, who had paused to see what the result of the affair would be.

"What do you mean by throwing that fellow down on top of us, anyway?" cried one fellow, almost dancing up and down in excitement.

"Yes, what do you mean by it?" from another.

"I didn't know you gentlemen were coming along," said Dick, mildly.

"Oh, you didn't, eh?"

"No."

"And you didn't do it on purpose, then?"

"Of course not."

"Humph! What was the trouble, anyway?"

"Why, the man barred our way and wouldn't let us enter the tavern, and so I grabbed him and threw him over the railing."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed that you could have done it; why, he is pretty nearly twice as large as you."

"I know that; but he isn't so strong."

"That's strange."

"It's a lie! I am stronger than he!" cried the redcoat who had caused all the trouble, scrambling to his feet. "And I'm going to just about kill you, you young scoundrel! You took an unfair advantage of me."

"What a lie!" said Bob.

"That's right; it is a very great lie," said Dick. "We gave you repeated warnings, you big baby!"

"What's that! You dare to call me a baby?"

The redcoat made a rush for the piazza steps as he spoke, and was met by Dick, who was not disposed to fool with him much longer.

"Knock his head off, Dick!" said Bob, who would have been glad to have had the chance to do the work himself.

Crack! Dick's fist caught the big redcoat fairly between the eyes and sent him reeling backward against his friends, who braced him up and kept him from falling.

"What's the matter with you?" cried one, in a tone of disgust. "Don't let him do that again. You are big enough to eat him up."

With a roar of rage the man leaped forward again, and again Dick struck him a strong blow which, this time, stretched him at full length on the pavement, his friends not being where they could catch him and prevent him from falling.

"Great guns!" gasped one.

"Blazes! but the young fellow can hit hard, can't he?"

"I wouldn't have believed it!"

"He has the advantage because he is on the piazza, while the other man is down on the pavement."

Such were a few of the exclamations, and Dick stepped down onto the pavement, saying:

"I don't need to have any advantage to enable me to thrash him. I will quickly prove that to your satisfaction."

The blow dealt the redcoat had been very severe, and the shock of the fall had been considerable, too, and the two things had temporarily dazed the man so that he did not at once get up, but lay there blinking up at the sky.

"Come, come; get up!" said Dick.

The fallen man struggled to a sitting posture and glared at Dick with eyes of hate.

"Yes, I'll get up," he growled; "I'll get up, never fear—and when I do you want to look out!"

"Bah! barking dogs never bite."

"You will find out to the contrary."

"Get up and let me knock you down again. I think that one more round will settle you."

"You think that, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, I am quite sure of it."

The redcoat scrambled to his feet and tried to make a showing of being glad of another chance at the youth who had handled him so roughly, but a close observer might have seen enough in the expression on his face and in his eyes to give the impression that the fellow really had about all he wanted and would have been willing to stop but for the presence of his comrades, who would have given him the laugh had he shown the white feather.

He made a sudden, desperate rush at Dick, doubtless in the hope of taking him by surprise; but he failed, for the youth was on his guard, and met the redcoat with a left-handed blow in the face, followed by a terrible right-handed blow in the pit of the stomach.

This last was delivered with all of Dick's strength, and was a terrible blow. Down went the big man, with a thump, and he immediately began kicking and thumping around like a chicken with its head cut off, and the groans to which he gave utterance were something terrible to listen to.

"Oh, I'm—a—dead—man!" he managed to gasp. "I—will—never—get—over this!"

"Oh, yes, you will!" said Dick. "You are far from being a dead man. You are, or ought to be, a wiser man, however."



"Yes, this ought to be a lesson to you to mind your own business in future," said Bob.

"I guess he will," said one of the members of the party of redcoats.

"Say, young fellow, you are a wonder!" said another.

"You can hit as hard as a mule can kick!" from still another.

"Have you had enough?" asked Dick, addressing the roaring man.

"Yes—I've—had—enough!" was the gasping reply.

"He's had more than enough, young fellow!" said one of the redcoats with a grin.

"Very well; then we will go into the tavern," said Dick, and he and Bob entered.

They engaged a room and paid for it; and then as they had not yet had anything to eat they went into the dining-room and ate their supper.

They had just come back out into the office and bar-room, when a man stuck his head in through the doorway and called out:

"Fire! Fire!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DICK AND BOB FREE SOME PRISONERS.

"Where is the fire?" asked Bob, in some excitement.

"It's down on the river."

"On the river?"

"Yes."

"What is on fire?" asked Dick.

"One of the prison-ships."

"One of the prison-ships?"

"Yes; there's two of 'em, you know."

"No, we didn't know it; you see, we are strangers in the city."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes."

"Well, come along down to the river and watch the ship burn, and listen to the yells of the rebels as they roast inside the old hulk!"

Instantly Dick and Bob leaped forward.

"Are there prisoners in the ship?" Dick asked.

"Yes."

"Quick, then! Let us hasten down there. Come along, Bob!"

The two "Liberty Boys" and several other men who had

been in the barroom accompanied the man down the street in the direction of the river front.

"How many prisoners are there in the ship?" asked Dick as they hastened along.

"I heard a man say there are four."

"But they'll get them out, won't they?"

"There wasn't anything being done toward it when I came away a few minutes ago."

"Surely they won't let the poor fellows burn to death!" said Bob.

"What's the difference? They are rebels."

"'Rebels,' as you call them, have feelings the same as other people," said Dick.

"That may be, but what do we care?"

The cold-blooded remark of the fellow aroused Dick's blood to fever heat, and acting on the impulse of the moment he dealt the man a blow on the jaw, knocking him headlong to the ground.

"Take that, you hard-hearted brute!" murmured Dick, without pausing to see how it fared with the fellow.

"That's the way to serve such scoundrels, Dick!" exclaimed Bob, in delight.

"Say, that's a pretty way to treat a fellow!" said one of the men who had accompanied them from the tavern.

"He got only what he deserved," said Dick, quietly.

"Well, I don't know about that. You are entirely too free with that fist of yours, I'm thinking."

"Think it all you want to," retorted Dick, "I don't care!"

The man uttered a hoarse growl, but made no intelligible reply. Perhaps he feared that if he said too much he might get a dose of the same kind of medicine.

The light made by the flames from the burning ship were now plain to be seen and was a good guide to lead them to the spot. They were soon at the river, and only a short distance from the shore was the old hulk—now blazing fiercely.

"Have the prisoners been brought off from the ship?" Dick asked of a man standing near.

"I don't know; I only just got here," was the reply.

There was a great crowd present, and Dick addressed the same inquiry to another man, who said that the prisoners were still on board the hulk.

"An' I think they'll stay there," he added; "nobody is goin' to risk his life to set 'em free. They're only rebels, you know."

"What if they are rebels!" cried Dick. "They are men, and if the people stand here and let them roast in that hulk they are worse than savages!"



"Maybe you'd like the job of savin' 'em?" grinned the man.

"I'm ready and willing to do all I can toward it," was the prompt reply.

"And so am I!" cried Bob.

"Bah! you are fools!" sneered the man. "Don't you see that the hulk is burning like tinder? You could not reach and save the prisoners."

At this instant cries of pain and terror came from the hulk.

"Hear that!" cried Dick.

"It is terrible!" said Bob. "I can't stand here and listen to it, Dick."

"Nor I! Come, Bob, let's try to rescue the poor fellows."

"I'm with you, Dick!"

The two darted through the crowd, pushing the men aside without ceremony, and causing many of them to utter angry exclamations.

"Hold on, there! What are you about?" cried a British soldier who was patrolling the shore, musket in hand.

"Stand aside; we are going to try to rescue the prisoners and save them from such a horrible death," said Dick.

"Get back, you fools!" the soldier cried. "You are not going to do anything of the kind."

"Yes, we are; stand aside and let us pass."

"What do you take me for? Get back into the crowd or I'll bayonet you!" and the soldier made a threatening motion with his musket.

"Come back!"

"You fellows are crazy!"

"You couldn't rescue the prisoners!"

"What's the use of doing it, anyway?"

"Let 'em burn! It'll save the trouble of having to shoot or hang 'em!"

Such were a few of the cries from the crowd, but Dick and Bob were not disposed to go back. They realized that there were four patriot prisoners in the hulk of the old ship, and that the poor fellows would be roasted like rats in a trap unless rescued; and they were determined to save them, if such a thing was possible.

"Come along, Bob," said Dick, and he again started forward.

"Back, or I'll run this through you!" the soldier cried, angrily, and he made a threatening motion with the weapon.

That was all he did do, however, for Dick seized hold of the barrel of the musket, jerked the weapon out of its owner's hands and threw it into the river. Then as the redcoat made a motion as if to strike him, Dick caught the fellow by the wrist and hurled him out of the way with

the utmost ease. Then the two daring youths ran where a pier extended out into the river and ran upon it.

At one corner of the pier was a tall post, which was used as a flagstaff, there being pieces of wood nailed on it that a man could climb to the top and put up the flag and take it down. One end of the burning prison-ship was within ten or twelve feet of the post, and Dick and Bob had taken note of this at the first glance.

They ran out on the pier at the top of their speed, paying no attention to the yells from those on shore, the curses of the British soldier, and Dick climbed the post until he reached a point ten or a dozen feet higher than the rail of the old hulk. Then he braced himself and leaped boldly toward the prison-ship, a cry of consternation and wonder escaping the crowd as they witnessed the daring feat.

And daring it certainly was, for in reaching the deck of the prison-ship the youth was forced to leap through a solid sheet of flame. He alighted on the deck in safety, however, and found that the floor was solid, the fire being as yet confined to the sides of the hulk.

Bob followed Dick's lead. He was a reckless youth, and the feat had no terrors for him. He was up the post in a jiffy, and had made the leap the same as Dick had done. And he made it in safety, too, and a few moments later stood on the deck beside Dick.

"Well, here we are, old man," he said; "now to find the prisoners!"

"This way, Bob," said Dick, and he led the way to the companionway and made his way down it, Bob following closely. The door leading into the cabin was locked, but the youths threw themselves against it with all their might and the door flew off its hinges.

They found nobody in the cabin, and made their way where a ladder led down into the hold from a little, cub-like backroom.

They climbed down the ladder and had no trouble in finding the prisoners, the poor fellows' cries being a sufficient guide.

It was very hot down in the hold, and although the fire had not yet eaten through the hull, it soon would, and the heat had penetrated.

"How many are there of you?" asked Dick, for it was so dark it was impossible to see.

"Thank heaven, somebody has come to set us free!" cried one of the prisoners.

"There are four of us," replied a voice; "but who are you that you do not know this?"



"We are friends," said Dick; "we are patriots, like yourselves."

"Thank heaven!" was the exclamation. "Free us quickly, then, friends, and let us get out of this furnace!"

"How are you bound?"

"With rope."

"We will have you free in a jiffy, then. Out with your knife, Bob."

The youths drew their knives and quickly cut the ropes binding the arms of the four prisoners.

"Now come with us," said Dick; "we have no time to spare, for—see! the fire is breaking through into the hold, now, and in a few moments the water will be pouring in here at a great rate!"

The youths and the four rescued prisoners hastened to make their way up the ladder, out of the hold, and into the cabin; and as they did so they heard a great hissing sound and the hole up through which they had just come was filled with steam. The fire had penetrated through the hull.

"Come to the end of the ship farthest from the shore," said Dick, "for now that you four men are free there is no reason why you should not attempt to make your escape altogether. Do you feel equal to the task of swimming across the river?"

"Yes, yes!" was the reply in chorus. "We can do anything, if by so doing we will achieve our freedom."

"Doff your outer clothing," suggested Dick; "it will be in the way and a detriment to you in swimming. You will be better off with just your under-clothing on."

The four men coincided with this view of the case, and hastily doffed their shoes and outer clothing.

"Now, then," said Dick, "take a running start and leap right through the flames at the end of the hulk. It is quite easy ways to the water, but you will not be injured, in all likelihood. If you reach the other shore make your way northward till you get opposite to Tarrytown; then cross the river and head for White Plains."

"All right, we will do as you say," said one, and the four shook hands with Dick and Bob, thanked them for what they had done for them, and then, one after another, ran and leaped through the sheet of flame and disappeared from view.

"Now we had better be getting off this old hulk, Bob," said Dick.

"So we had, old man."

"Come along, then; follow me. We will leap overboard on the shore side so as to make a landing, and at the same time attract attention away from the escaping prisoners."

Then, one after the other, the two daring youths ran and leaped through the sheet of flame and struck in the water only a few yards from the shore, toward which they hastily made their way.

But when they reached the shore they were treated to an unwelcome surprise: A dozen British soldiers stepped forward and the leader said:

"You are our prisoners!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### PRISONERS.

"What's that you say?" cried Dick.

"You fellows are crazy!" exclaimed Bob.

"No, we are not; we are simply doing our duty," was the reply.

"You are exceeding your duty," said Dick.

"Not at all."

"I think you are."

"I know we are not."

"But why should you make prisoners of us?"

"It is very simple."

"Tell us the reason, then."

"Very well; I suppose you will not deny that you have just been aboard the prison-ship?"

"No."

"Well, that is contrary to rules."

"It is?"

"Yes; no outsiders are allowed on either of the prison-ships, my young friends."

"But the ship is on fire and the prisoners were likely to be burned to death."

"Which would have been a very simple way of getting rid of them."

"You are a brute!" cried Bob, heatedly.

"What's that? You dare speak to me, a British officer, in any such manner as that?"

A murmur went up from the crowd, which was mainly Tory in its sympathies.

"Don't take any talk from them, lieutenant!"

"Go ahead and arrest the rascals!"

"They must be rebels!"

"They have set the prisoners free; now make them prisoners in the others' stead."

Such were a few of the exclamations.

"I said only what I meant, and what I will stick to,"



said Bob, with spirit; "I say that any one who will calmly make such a statement as the one you made about letting the prisoners burn, is a brute!"

"That will do!" said the officer, who was a young lieutenant and consequently quite important and bigoted. "Seize the rebels, men!"

"Hold!" cried Dick. "You are making a bad mistake, lieutenant."

"I know my business. Did you not set the four prisoners free?"

"Yes, we cut their bonds and helped them to escape from the burning hulk."

"Well, that constitutes treason and makes you out to be rebels."

"You are mistaken; what we did was done in the interests of humanity."

"Bah! You freed some rebels, and that settles the matter so far as you two fellows are concerned."

"It won't do any good to argue with the idiot, Dick," said Bob.

"I guess you are right, Bob."

"Seize them, I say!" roared the lieutenant, in a rage on account of having been called an idiot.

The redcoats stepped forward and seized the youths, who had no chance of making their escape, as they were surrounded on three sides by a great crowd of people, all of whom were loyal to the king, while on the fourth side—behind them—was the water.

They might have leaped into the water, but would undoubtedly have been riddled by bullets before they could have gotten away, the burning hulk making it light as day for hundreds of yards in all directions.

Seeing the uselessness of doing so the two did not make any attempt at resistance, and were led away, being jeered at by the people, who, instead of praising the youths and cheering them for their bravery in boarding the hulk and saving the four prisoners from a terrible death by burning, were inclined to dislike them for having done it.

It was not far from the river front to Fraunce's Tavern, where the British had their headquarters, and as the lieutenant and his men and the two prisoners reached the tavern, they were accosted by some of the officers, the piazza being filled with British officers, among them being General Clinton himself.

"Whom have you there?" asked General Clinton.

"A couple of rebels, your excellency," replied the lieutenant, saluting.

"Rebels, you say?"

"Yes, sir!" The young officer fairly swelled with importance.

"Where did you get hold of them?"

"Down by the river, sir."

"What were they doing?"

"They boarded the burning hulk, sir, and freed the prisoners!"

"What's that you say! They boarded the hulk and the prisoners free?"

"Yes."

"Why had not some of our men taken the prisoners the hulk?"

"The fire was too greatly under headway before it was discovered, sir, and our men would not risk being burned in order to bring the prisoners off."

"Yet these two men boarded the hulk, you say?"

"Yes, sir; but they are rebels and were willing to risk their lives in order to save the prisoners."

"Humph! Bring them closer. I wish to see what sort of looking fellows they are."

The soldiers advanced and Dick and Bob stood within a few feet of the commander-in-chief of the British army. General Clinton eyed the two closely and presently gave a start.

"Ha! I think I have seen these two fellows before!" exclaimed.

"Say you so, general?" remarked another officer.

"Yes."

"Where have you seen them?"

"On the field of battle."

"What?"

"Yes."

"On what battlefield?"

"Well, on several, I think; but on the Monmouth battlefield, I know."

"Are you sure, general?"

"And you are confident they are rebels?"

"Do you know who they are?"

"This is astonishing!"

"Yes, I know they are rebels," went on General Clinton "and I know who they are, too—or at least I know who this one is," and he pointed at Dick.

"Who is he?"

"Tell us, general!"

"Yes, yes!"

"Tell us, quick!"

"Very well," said the commander-in-chief, in a slow impressive manner; "that fellow is no other than—Dick Slater, the noted captain of the company of youths known



as "The Liberty Boys of '76," of whom you have all heard many times!"

"What!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Dick Slater, the rebel spy!"

"Are you sure you are not mistaken, General Clinton?"

"There is no mistake about it," the commander-in-chief said; "I have seen Dick Slater at close range two or three times, and would know his face anywhere. Lieutenant, you have done a good night's work in making a prisoner of Dick Slater and his comrade, who is doubtless another of the 'Liberty Boys.'"

The young officer swelled with importance and pride until he seemed in imminent danger of bursting.

"I knew they were important prisoners, your excellency," he said.

"Oh, what a lie!" said Bob.

"See here; don't talk impudently to me!" growled the lieutenant.

"Well, Dick Slater, what have you to say for yourself?" asked General Clinton, with considerable triumph in his tone.

"Nothing, general."

"Nothing, eh?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You won't tell me what you are doing here in New York, then?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I did."

The general and his officers laughed.

"There may be something in that," one said.

"Nevertheless let us hear what you have to say," said Clinton.

"Oh, well, I will tell you; but you won't believe me, of course. We came down here to see our girls."

"Tell us the names of your girls and where they live, and then we will believe you."

The youth shook his head.

"I could not think of doing that," he said.

"Well, let that pass," said the commander-in-chief; "tell me, did you set the four prisoners free who were on the burning hulk?"

"We did, sir."

"And they escaped?"

"I don't know, sir. All I know is that we freed them and they leaped overboard."

"Ah, I see; well, I guess they must have made their escape."

"I hope so!"

"I have no doubt regarding that," with a smile; "well,

my young friend, you have gotten yourself into great trouble, do you know it?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You have; you see, you have been very active—altogether too active, and you have done so much work against the British in the way of spying and so forth, that you have forfeited your right to live, many times over."

"I can't help that, sir. I have done only what I considered to be my duty."

"You are doomed, Dick Slater—unless you accept an offer which I am going to make you."

"What is the offer, sir?"

"That you will espouse the cause of the king and fight for him as you have heretofore been fighting against him."

The youth gave utterance to a laugh of scorn.

"I guess you don't know to whom you are talking, after all, sir!" he said, proudly. "I am not a traitor, and I would die a thousand deaths before I would fight for King George, the tyrant!"

"He is not a tyrant, boy!"

"He is nothing else!"

"Then you refuse my offer?" in a cold, stern voice.

"I do! I don't think much of you for making such a proposition!"

General Clinton flushed with anger.

"You are impudent, Dick Slater!" he said.

"No, I am just telling the truth."

"That will do; lieutenant, take the prisoners and incarcerate them in the other prison-ship."

"Yes, your excellency."

"See to it that they do not escape."

"I will, sir."

"If they should succeed in making their escape your head shall pay the forfeit!"

"They shall not escape, sir."

"Very well; away with them."

The lieutenant gave the order and Dick and Bob were led away. Half an hour later they occupied a position in the damp, foul-smelling hold of the other prison hulk, which lay a quarter of a mile farther down the shore.

"Well, Bob, it looks black for us!" said Dick, when they had been left alone.

## CHAPTER X.

IRENE, THE MESSENGER.

"Father! father! Dick Slater and his companion, Bob Estabrook, have been captured by the British!"



"What is that you say, Irene? Dick Slater and his friend captured?"

"Yes, father!"

"When?"

"Just a little while ago."

"Where?"

"Down by the river, where the prison hulk was on fire."

The scene was the interior of the library in the home of Monsieur Ricard. His daughter Irene had just entered, and she was greatly excited.

She had left the house an hour after the two "Liberty Boys" had taken their departure, and with hundreds of others had made her way to the river front when the cry of fire was raised. She had been witness to the brave action of the two youths in boarding the burning hulk and freeing the prisoners, and had seen them made prisoners on coming ashore, as already told. She had followed the redcoats when they took Dick and Bob to Fraunce's Tavern, and had heard the conversation between Dick and General Clinton, and then she had followed again and seen the youths taken aboard the other prison hulk. Then she had hastened home and had burst in upon her father with the exclamation as given above.

"How came they to be made prisoners, Irene?" asked her father.

The girl hastened to tell him the entire story, and when she had finished Monsieur Ricard said:

"The young men did well in freeing the four prisoners, Irene, but it is unfortunate that they were made prisoners themselves."

"Yes, indeed, father; it is very, very unfortunate!"

"If I should receive the information regarding the movements of the French fleet, now, there would be no one to carry the information to the commander-in-chief of the patriot army."

"You are wrong, father," said the girl, quietly.

"Wrong?" in a tone of surprise.

"Yes."

"Who would carry it?"

"I would!"

Monsieur Ricard started and gazed at his daughter in amazement.

"You, Irene?" he almost gasped.

"Yes, father; more, I wish to go to the headquarters of the patriot army and take the news that Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook are prisoners, so that plans may be laid to rescue them."

"What, you go away up to White Plains, Irene?"

"Yes, father."

"But, daughter, think of the danger."

"There will not be much danger, father."

"Yes, there will be great and numerous dangers, Irene."

"Of what do they consist?"

"Well, first, you will have to take your chances on being suspected and captured by the British right here in New York."

"I have no fears that I will be unable to get out of the city, father."

"But there will be danger after that."

"Where, father?"

"On the road from the Harlem River up to White Plains."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; you see, that is known as the neutral grounds and it is overrun by Cowboys and Skinners, a party of whom you are likely to encounter."

"Surely they would not injure a girl?"

"They might not, and then again they might."

"I am more than willing to risk it, father."

The man gazed fondly and proudly at his daughter.

"You are a brave little girl, Irene!" he said.

"I would not be like my father if I were not brave."

"Oh, you little flatterer!" with a laugh. "You know how to come it over your old father when you wish to have your way about something."

The girl threw her arms around her father's neck.

"No, I am not flattering you, father dear," she said.

"I meant every word I uttered."

The man kissed his daughter and then said:

"I cannot find it in my heart to refuse you the privilege of going to White Plains, Irene."

"Oh, thank you, father dear!"

"When will you make the start?"

"Whenever you think best for me to go, father."

"Well, I think it will be best for you to go by daylight."

"Then I will start early in the morning."

"Very well; and in the meantime we may hear some word of the French fleet, in which case you will have some news to take to General Washington."

"You think there is no danger that Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook may be shot or hanged to-morrow, father?"

"Oh, no, Irene. They will be held prisoners a week or two, possibly a month, before their case will be acted upon."

"Very well; then there is no need of great haste."

"None at all, Irene."

After some further talk the girl bade her father good-night and went to her room and to bed, her father re-



maining up long enough to finish his smoke, when he, too, made his way to his room and to bed.

After breakfast next morning the girl ordered the servant to bridle and saddle her horse and bring him around to the door. "I am going for a ride," she said.

She went in and was surprised to find a man with her father.

"This is a messenger from the South, Irene," said her father; "he brings me good news of the coming of the French fleet to co-operate with the patriot army in reducing New York and capturing the British in the city and the warships in the harbor. Wait but a few minutes and I will give you a letter to take to General Washington."

"Very well, father," said Irene, who was glad that she was to be the bearer of some good news as well as bad.

When the letter was ready Irene concealed it in the bosom of her dress, and then kissing her father, she bade him good-by, shook hands with the messenger and then went out, mounted her horse and rode away.

Irene was a beautiful girl, and she attracted a good deal of attention and favorable comment while riding through the streets of the city. Redcoats and citizens alike gazed at her in admiration, and some who knew her bowed gallantly.

With flushed face and eyes shining with excitement Irene rode onward and was soon crossing the Common. Entering the Bowery Lane—now the world-famous "Bowery," but then only a country lane lined on either side by bushes, flowers and rude fences—the girl rode onward at a faster gait. She was entering the country, now, and the fresh air and the thought that she was really entering upon an adventure, caused the girl's heart to leap with pleasure and joy—for she was a girl who loved adventure and excitement.

Onward she rode, and although she met several parties of redcoats, no one attempted to stop or molest her; indeed, the redcoats gazed admiringly, and would, no doubt, have been willing to fight for the girl if by so doing they could have won a smile from her.

At last the Harlem River was reached and here a British sentinel was encountered. He was on guard at a bridge which crossed the stream.

"Which way, miss?" he asked, respectfully, doffing his hat.

"I am going across the river a ways, sir, to visit my aunt, who lives there," was the ready reply.

"How far is it to your aunt's home?"

"About three miles."

"Aren't you afraid to venture that far, miss?"

"What should I be afraid of, sir?"

"Cowboys and Skinners, miss."

The girl shook her head and then drew a pistol from the saddle-bag hanging from the pommel of the saddle.

"You see, I am armed," she said; "and if they attempt to bother me I will not hesitate to shoot."

"You are a brave girl!" the soldier said in admiration.

"Oh, I don't think there is any danger, sir; I have been to my aunt's home before and was never bothered on the road."

"Very well; go along, then. I hope you will not be bothered, miss."

"Thank you, sir."

Then the brave girl rode onward, and, having crossed the bridge, urged her horse to a gallop.

"I wonder what that redcoat would have said if he had known who I am and that I have important letters for the commander-in-chief of the patriot army?" said Irene to herself, with a smile. "He would be angry if he knew all; but he didn't even suspect. Well, all is fair in love or war, and this is war."

Onward the girl rode, and although she met one or two gangs of men, they did not bother her or attempt to stop her. It was not to be that she was to get through without an adventure, however, for when she was within three miles of White Plains she was confronted by a huge fellow, dressed in the clothing of a hunter. He was an evil-faced fellow and stepped out in front of the horse and ordered the girl to halt.

She obeyed, but called out, sharply:

"Who are you, sir, and why have you halted me?" At the same time she cautiously and slyly let her hand slip down till it rested on the butt of the pistol in the saddle-bag.

"I want er kiss frum ye, purty wun!" was the reply, with a leer. "Ye air erbout ther purtiest shemale whut I've seen in er month uv Sundays, an' I kain't let ye pass heer, nohow, until arter ye hev paid ther toll."

"Oh, you are the toll-taker, are you?" remarked the girl, sarcastically. Strange to say, she did not feel at all alarmed; indeed, she was thinking of what a surprise she had in store for the fellow.

"Thet's whut I am, miss, an' now, I'll jes' take ther kiss, ef ye please," and he started to advance to the side of the horse.

He paused suddenly, however, for he found the girl's pistol staring him full in the face.

"Stand where you are!" cried the girl, in a clear, ringing



voice. "Stand where you are or I will put a bullet through you!"

The man paused quickly enough and stared in amazement and horror. Then something very like a curse escaped his lips and he made a sudden leap, hoping to take the girl by surprise.

He made a mistake in his calculations, however, for the girl was on her guard and fired without hesitation. She was a good shot, as a rule, but the man's action disconcerted her aim somewhat and so she only succeeded in putting a bullet through the fellow's ear.

This pained him terribly, however, and as he was, as might have been expected, a coward, he uttered a wild yell of terror and clapping his hand to the side of his head, leaped in among the trees at the roadside and dashed away at the top of his speed. The girl could hear the crackling of the underbrush for quite a while, showing that the frightened man was still running, and then with a laugh of amusement she thrust the pistol back in the saddle-bag and rode onward.

"That was a splendid shot, miss!" cried a voice, and a young man rode out and ranged his horse alongside the one ridden by the girl; "that was a little bit the neatest thing I ever saw done! You are a brave girl!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### TO THE RESCUE.

"Who are you?" asked Irene, giving her companion a sharp look.

"My name is Mark Morrison, miss, and I am a member of the company of young fellows known as 'The Liberty Boys of '76.' "

"Good! good!" exclaimed Irene. "Then you are just the person I wish to see!"

"And you are just the person I wish to see!" said Mark, with such a meaning look that the beautiful girl blushed like a peony.

"You mustn't try to flatter me," she said, with a smile; "I have some very valuable information for you—something that will interest you."

"What is it, miss?"

"Your captain's name is Dick Slater, is it not?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you have a friend whose name is Bob Estabrook?"

"Yes."

"And those two young men went to New York yesterday on a mission for the commander-in-chief?"

"They did." Mark was growing interested now.

"Well, my father, Monsieur Ricard, is the man they went to New York to see."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; they were at our house, but as my father had not yet become possessed of the information which the young men were to secure, they went to a tavern to stay until father did receive the information."

"Yes?"

"Yes; but last night a prison-ship in the river caught on fire and burned down, and Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook went on board the ship and set the four prisoners free and they escaped."

"Good for Dick and Bob!"

"But as soon as they came ashore the two young men were taken prisoners."

"They were?" Mark was excited now.

"Yes; and they were taken and incarcerated in another old prison-ship which lies in the river not far from where the one was that was burned."

"Ah! and they are there now?"

"Yes."

"They must be rescued!"

"Yes, yes! That is the main reason why I have come away up here from New York."

"To let us know, eh?"

"Yes."

"As I said a minute ago, you are a brave girl, Miss—"

"Irene Ricard is my name."

"And a pretty name it is—but not so pretty as the owner of the name."

"Come, come, Mr. Morrison!" warned the girl; "no compliments. There is work to do."

"I know that, Miss Irene, and we will do the work too. Some of the 'Liberty Boys' will be away soon, and will rescue Dick and Bob, or know the reason why."

"Good! they are brave young men, and it would be terrible if they were to be shot or hanged by the British."

"It shall not be, Miss Irene! We will save them."

"How much farther to the patriot encampment?"

"Not far; only a mile or so."

"Then let us hasten. I have letters for the commander-in-chief, containing information from my father, regarding the French fleet."

"Ah! that is good. I will accompany you to headquarters, when we reach the encampment, and will ask the



privilege of taking some of the 'Liberty Boys' and going down to New York to rescue Dick and Bob."

"Very well; I am glad that I encountered you."

"And so am I!" with a meaning look that again brought a blush to the girl's cheeks.

"If you don't stop talking that way I will ride on and leave you!" said the girl, with a laugh.

"I'd like to see you do it!" with an answering laugh.

"My horse can run as fast as yours, and I would keep alongside you, if I killed my animal!"

"Oh, you bad, bad fellow!"

"Say, do you know, Miss Irene, if I had not witnessed the manner in which you discourage such advances I am afraid I should have done like the hunter did, back yonder—tried to kiss you!"

"I wouldn't advise you to try it, sir!" with a half-roguish, half-threatening look on her face.

Mark laughed, and they rode onward, chatting as they went. Half an hour later they rode into the patriot encampment, which was a mile from the village of White Plains, and they alighted in front of the house in which Washington had his headquarters.

Mark and the girl entered together, and the youth introduced Irene to the commander-in-chief, who arose and bowed with courtly grace, and then shook hands with the girl, heartily.

"Well, well! this is indeed an honor to have my old friend, Monsieur Ricard's daughter come and see me!" the great man exclaimed. "But where are Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook?"

"Prisoners, sir!" the girl replied.

"Prisoners?"

"Yes, your excellency."

A shadow came over the great man's face, and motioning to a chair he said: "Be seated, and then tell me all, Miss Ricard."

The girl took the seat and then told the story quickly and tersely, the commander-in-chief listening with interest.

"Too bad, too bad!" he said, when she had finished. "I am indeed sorry that Dick and Bob were captured. But they must be rescued, eh, Mark?"

"Yes, your excellency; that is why I came here. I wish to be permitted to take some of the 'Liberty Boys' and go and rescue Dick and Bob."

"Very good; that is as it should be. 'Liberty Boys' to the rescue of 'Liberty Boys.' Yes, you may take such a number of the youths as you deem necessary or advisable, and go and rescue Dick and Bob. They must be rescued! We cannot get along without them!"

"Thank you, sir!" cried Mark, and then with an admiring look at Irene, he hastened from the room and house and to the "Liberty Boys' " quarters.

"And I have a letter for you, father, sir," said Irene, producing it.

"Ah, that is good news! Perhaps it contains the information I am wanting," and the great man took the letter, tore it open and read the contents with interest.

"Yes, yes! this is just what I wished to learn," he declared; "it is the information which I sent Dick and Bob to New York to secure, and now that I have it all that is necessary is to rescue them and all will be well."

"I am glad that the information is of value, sir," said Irene.

"It is valuable, indeed; but now you must be hungry, Miss Ricard. Come; I will show you to the dining-room where the good woman of the house has just finished setting dinner, and you shall dine with me."

The girl's face flushed with delight at thought of sitting up to the table with the commander-in-chief of the patriot army.

They went into the dining-room and took seats at the table and ate dinner, while the great man chatted to the girl pleasantly, treating her in every way as if she were his own daughter.

Meanwhile Mark had reached the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys," and had conveyed to his comrades the information that Dick and Bob were prisoners in the old prison-ship down in the river in lower New York City.

"We must rescue them, boys!"

"Yes, yes!"

"We will rescue them or die trying!"

"That's what we will!"

"I want three of you boys to go with me," said Mark; "and as I know all of you will want to be the ones to go, I will name the three, and I don't want the rest to feel hurt or think I am showing any partiality, for such is not my intention."

"Oh, that's all right, Mark," said one; "pick out your men and we won't say a word, as we know we can't all go."

"That's the way to talk."

"What is your plan, Mark?"

"We will ride over to Tarrytown on the Hudson, and will leave our horses there and take a boat down the river. We will drop down till we are even with the old prison-ship, and will then cross over and board it and rescue the boys."

"That's a good plan," said one, and all nodded assent. Mark then selected three of the youths to accompany



him, and they began making their preparations for the trip.

They first ate their dinner and then when all was ready they mounted their horses, bade good-by to their comrades and rode away toward the west.

An hour's ride brought them to Tarrytown, where they tied their horses in the timber, and making their way down to the river, hired a boat of an old boatman. They secured a lantern also as they thought they would need a light.

Then they waited till about four o'clock, and getting in the boat, started.

They permitted the boat to float downstream and kept close to the west shore of the river, as they did not wish to have themselves seen and examined critically by British eyes.

They drifted down till they were nearly opposite the northern end of the city, and then they rowed into a little cove and waited till it was dark.

"We must not be in too big a hurry," said Mark.

"No, we must wait till the city is asleep," agreed one.

So they ate the cold food they had brought along, and waited till ten o'clock before making a start.

They lighted the old lantern, which, being a box affair, with a slide, was in reality a dark-lantern, and did not give any light until after the slide was opened.

They pushed out into the river and two of the boys took the oars as they would now have to row across the river.

They headed diagonally across and downstream, and after what seemed like an age the black outlines of the hull of the prison-ship loomed up before them.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RESCUE.

And now a serious difficulty confronted the would-be rescuers.

There was no way of getting aboard the prison-ship.

It was the old hull of what had at one time been one of the largest of battleships, and it was at least thirty feet to the top of the railing above the deck. The sides of the hull sloped in such a fashion that it would have been impossible for a cat, let alone a man, to climb up without the assistance of some one on the deck, or at least without having a rope to hold to, and nowhere could the youths find a rope, or signs of a ladder.

They rowed slowly and softly around the old hulk, feeling along the side as they did so, and could find nothing.

They were afraid to show a light for fear the sentinel on the deck of the prison-ship would see it and give the alarm.

While debating the matter of how they would get aboard the ship, they heard the sound of what seemed to be a struggle. It came from the deck of the prison-ship!

What could it mean?

They listened intently and strained their eyes in a vain effort to see what was going on above them.

They could see nothing.

They could hear, however, and they presently heard the sound of a groan, followed by a thud, as if a human form had fallen to the floor.

"There has been some kind of a fight taking place up there, boys!" whispered Mark.

"Yes," replied Sam Sanderson, in a cautious whisper. "Do you think it possible that Dick and Bob have succeeded in getting up out of the hold and overcoming the sentinel?"

"It is possible," said Mark, in some excitement. "I wish that such might be the case!"

They listened even more intently and were sure they heard the sound of low, cautious voices which came from the deck of the prison-ship.

Suddenly Mark, moved by an impulse, pulled the slide of the lantern and flashed the light up the side of the prison-ship.

He caught sight of two faces, which were sticking over the rail.

Even though the light from the lantern scarcely more than reached the distance, and was very faint, there, Mark was sure he recognized the faces.

They were those of Dick and Bob!

Lifting up his voice, yet speaking with caution, Mark called out:

"Is that you, Dick and Bob?"

"Yes, yes!" came back the reply, in cautious tones. "That you, Mark?"

"Yes, it is I—and three of the boys. Can you come down? We have a boat."

"We can find no ladder or rope to let ourselves down on," replied Mark.

"That is bad!"

"So it is; but we must get off this hulk, whether or not. We must jump if we can't get away otherwise."

"It will be a desperate leap, Dick!"

"Yes, but we will risk it. Hold the light so that we can see where to leap, Mark, and we will be down there in a jiffy!"

"All right."

There was a minute of suspense and then a dark form



came shooting down through the air and there was a splash as it struck the water.

The one who had leaped first was Bob, and he went clear down out of sight, but came up quickly and the youths seized hold of him and pulled him into the boat.

"Is Bob all right?" came down in Dick's voice.

"Yes," replied Mark. "Now for you!"

"Good! Here I come!"

Another dark form shot down through space and splash! went as it struck the water.

Like Bob, Dick went under, out of sight, but was quickly on the surface again and was helped into the boat.

"Are you hurt, Dick?" asked Mark.

"No, I'm all right—ah! we are discovered!" as a wild yell went up from the shore and the sharp crack of a musket was heard. "We must get away from here in a hurry, boys!"

Indeed, he was right.

A sentinel on the shore had caught sight of the lantern, and suspecting that all was not right, had given utterance to the yell and fired the shot from his musket.

Then the youths bent to the oars and rowed away with all their might, for they realized that there would be pursuers after them very soon.

This was the case, too. There were several boats on the shore, near the prison-ship, and when the soldiers came running in response to the sentinel's yell and shot, they lost no time in leaping into the boats and going in pursuit of the escaping prisoners.

The youths heard the sound of the rowlocks and worked with all their might.

"We must escape!" said Dick. "We must not permit ourselves to be overtaken, for if we should be captured they would hang or shoot us at once, and prevent all chance of our getting away again!"

"You are right," agreed Mark; "well, we won't let them catch us if we can help it."

They rowed with all their might, heading diagonally across the river, and they were pleased to find, after several minutes had elapsed, that they were holding their own. Their boat was a good one, and as it was probably not quite so heavily loaded down as were those of the pursuers, they were enabled to make good headway.

Finally they were as near the opposite shore as they dared to go, and then they headed upstream and continued their flight. The pursuing boats kept on after them for quite a while, but the "Liberty Boys" were pleased to note that they were, if anything, drawing away from the red-

coats, and they became calm and settled down to take things coolly.

"How did you boys know we were prisoners?" asked Dick, presently.

"A girl came up to the encampment to-day and told us," replied Mark.

"A girl!" in surprise.

"Yes."

"Who was she?"

"Miss Irene Ricard."

"Ah, I might have known!" exclaimed Dick. "She must have learned of our capture and then gotten permission from her father to go up and let you know of our being prisoners."

"Yes, that is it; and she brought some important information regarding the French fleet, too, I am sure, for she had a letter from her father, for the commander-in-chief."

"I'm glad of that, Mark. That makes everything all right, even if we did get captured, and were not successful in securing the information ourselves. If the girl took it to General Washington, that is just as good."

"Yes; well, that is what she did."

It was quite a pull up the river to Tarrytown, but the youths took turns at the work, and finally reached their destination. The pursuers had long since given up and turned back.

The youths paid the boatman for the use of the boat, and then mounting their horses—Mark and his companions had brought two extra ones for Dick and Bob—they rode away in the direction of White Plains.

An hour and a half later they reached the encampment, and as it was nearly morning they simply threw themselves down on blankets and caught a few winks of sleep before daylight.

After breakfast Dick and Mark went to headquarters and reported to the commander-in-chief.

General Washington was delighted to see Dick back again, and to learn that both he and Bob had gotten away in safety.

"The young lady, Miss Ricard, brought the information from her father that you were to have brought, Dick," he said; "so all is well, after all."

"I am glad of that, your excellency."

General Washington complimented Mark on the successful manner in which he had conducted the matter of rescuing Dick and Bob, and this pleased Mark wonderfully.

It did not please him so much as the smile of approval which was on the face of Irene Ricard, however, she hav-



ing entered while they were talking. There was no doubt of the fact that Mark had fallen in love with the beautiful French maiden, and if indications went for anything she was fully as much in love with him.

Irene said she must return to her home that day, and Mark asked permission to accompany her to the Harlem River. It was granted by the commander-in-chief, and immediately after dinner Mark and the girl rode away.

It would not be fair to tell what the two talked about while making the trip down to the Harlem River that afternoon, suffice it to say that the conversation—or the subject discussed, rather, was entirely satisfying to both, and so wholly engrossing that had a party of redcoats happened along it is likely that Mark would not have stood much chance of seeing them in time to make his escape, for his eyes were too constantly on the pretty, piquant face of Irene.

Just before they reached the Harlem River they paused and—but, there; I was near telling again! If they exchanged a few kisses on that occasion, were they to be blamed? I think not; and I think you will concur in this view of the matter, reader.

Irene really did have an aunt three miles away, in the neutral grounds, and it was decided that the two lovers should meet at the home of this aunt one week from that day, after which they parted, Irene crossing the river and continuing on, southward, while Mark turned his horse and rode back in the direction from which they had just come.

The sentinel remembered Irene, and asked her if she had had a pleasant visit at her aunt's, and the girl replied that she had. "I'm going up to see her next week," she added, and then rode on.

"That will prepare him for my appearance when I come again," she said to herself, with a smile. "If he became suspicious he might try to make me trouble."

When Irene reached her home her father had an interesting and thrilling story to tell her. Gilbert Gaspard, the captain of the band known as the Scarlet Dozen, had entered the house the night before and had appeared before Monsieur Ricard, with the announcement that he had come to carry Irene away a prisoner. Monsieur Ricard had told him that Irene was not at home, but the villain had refused to believe the statement, and, with his men, searched the house. Angered at not finding the girl he had again appeared before Monsieur Ricard with the statement that if he did not tell where Irene was concealed he would blow his (Monsieur Ricard's) brains out.

"I was too smart for him, however," the girl's father said, in a tone of satisfaction; "I had prepared myself,

and when he talked threateningly to me I suddenly presented my pistol and shot him dead!"

"Oh, father!" The girl's tone implied both horror and pleasure. She was horrified to think her father had killed a man, but was glad to know that she would never again be bothered by the scoundrel, Gilbert Gaspard.

"I thought you would be pleased to hear that Gaspard was dead, Irene," said her father.

"So I am, father; but it horrified me at first to think that you had been forced to kill a man."

"I hated to do it, of course, Irene, but these are war times and he was a villain who richly merited death."

"So he was; but did not his companions try to avenge his death?"

"They would have done so, but the sound of the shot was heard and a lot of people came into the house and the members of the Scarlet Dozen band were frightened away. I judge that they will disband, now that their leader is dead."

"Quite likely, father."

It is a matter of history that the French fleet failed to co-operate with Washington's army in the reduction of New York, on account of a strange and unexpected obstacle: The largest French warships could not enter the harbor on account of the bar of sand at the entrance, which would not permit their passage, even at high tide, and the project had to be abandoned. Otherwise General Clinton's army would have been forced to surrender when attacked from both the bay and the land.

Although disappointed, General Washington was not daunted or discouraged, and he at once began preparation for striking the British a blow at Newport.

THE END.

The next number (86) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' INDIAN FRIEND; OR, THE REDSKIN WHO FOUGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE," by Harry Moore.

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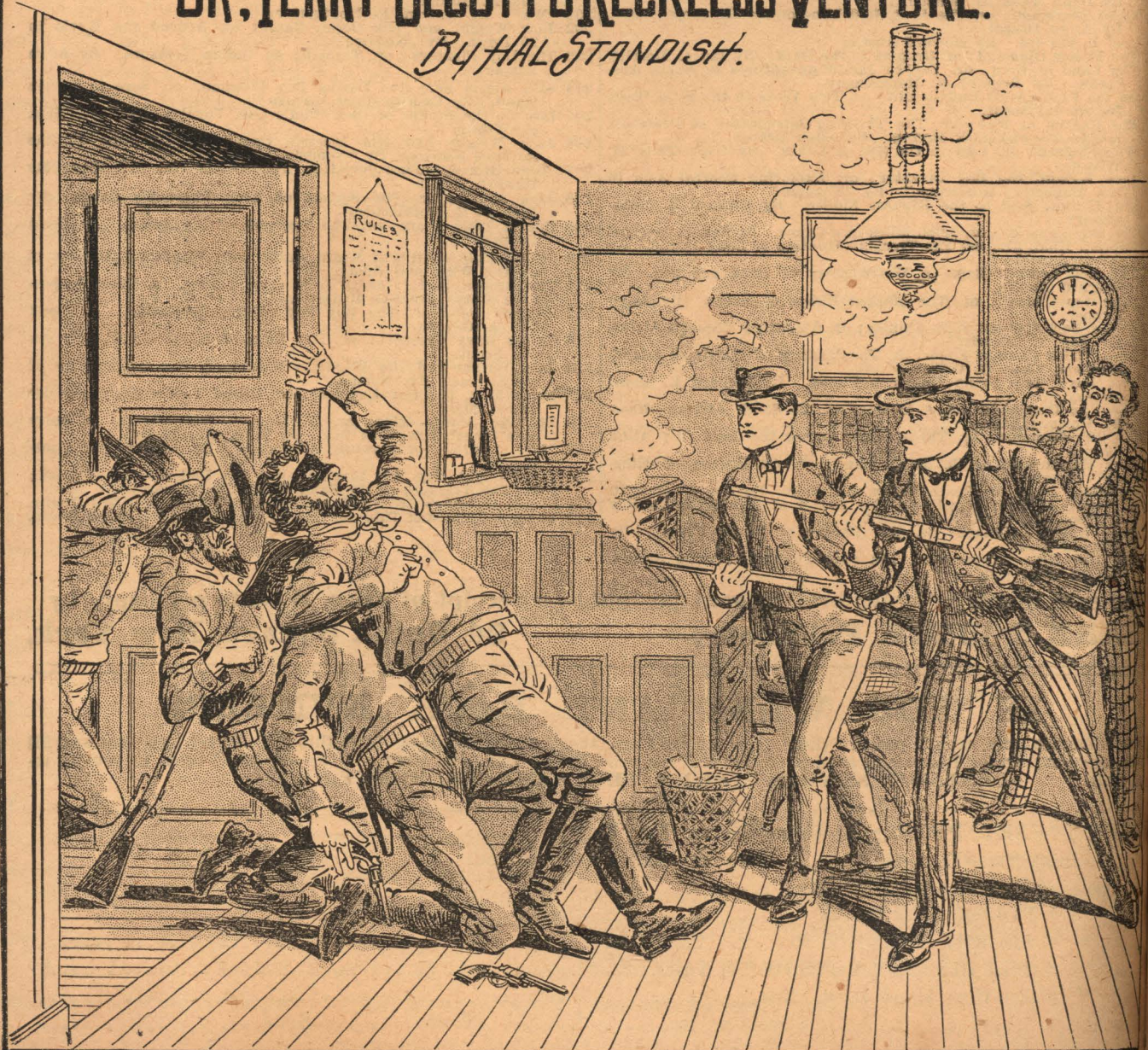
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